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The strangest election in the world? Reflecting on the 2020 General Election in Guernsey

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Abstract: This paper analyses the general election held on 7th October 2020 in the Bailiwick of Guernsey, a British Crown Dependency and the second largest of the Channel Islands with a population of 63,021. In an election described by the Electoral Reform Society as the strangest in the world (ERS, 2020), all thirty-eight members of the States of Guernsey were elected from an island wide list of 119 candidates using the multiple non-transferable vote (or 'bloc vote') variant of the 'first-past-the-post' system. The election disrupted the social networks of the previously highly localised parish based electoral system, and for the first time presented voters with three political parties, alongside the majority of candidates who stood as independents. This paper uses material obtained by interviews with those closely involved. It discusses Guernsey's unique system of government and the context within which the election took place. This paper concludes by reflecting on the prospects of an emerging party system, considers the consequences of the election results and draws out governance and political implications that may frame debates in Guernsey in the years ahead.

Keywords*:* Crown Dependencies, Guernsey, elections, political parties, referendums, small states, subnational jurisdictions, territories

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Introduction

The results of Guernsey's general election on 7th October 2020 were unpredictable and unprecedented. The move from a district ballot dominated by parish-based personalities to island-wide voting resulted for the first time in the election of sixteen candidates affiliated to a political party. The remaining twenty-two were elected as independents. There was a shift to the right, but not one strong enough to suggest a significant change in the island's existing centrist policy direction. Two of the three political parties enjoyed success at the polls, whilst a third failed to get any of its candidates elected. This article reviews the context, onset and implications of island-wide voting in Guernsey. It draws upon official reports, statistical data, news articles and interviews with a sample of key policy makers and opinion formers on the island, who were selected to reflect a range of election candidates, elected deputies, opinion formers and those in community leadership positions. The article is organised in the following manner. It starts by framing both Guernsey and its unique election in the context of the study of small states and territories by contextualising the island's politics and governance. In

undertaking a literature review that places Guernsey within the context of the politics of the Crown Dependencies, it argues that the shortage of research constitutes an unusual omission for a territory of its size, history and profile within the British Isles. It then discusses the theoretical underpinning and research methods used, arguing that a phenomenological approach is a particularly useful tool in this context. The article then reflects upon the findings of the research. The background to the 2020 general election, is considered, which reflects upon the radical change initiated by the 2018 electoral system referendum. It then initiates a discussion on the potential for an emerging party system in Guernsey by engaging with the literature on party typology. It argues that, despite a respectable degree of progress for those elected with a party affiliation, caution should be exercised in interpreting these results as a shift towards a party system. Finally, both the consequences of the election for the island's politics and governance are discussed alongside the wider implications of Guernsey's election, and future research directions are suggested.

Sarnia Cherie: Guernsey in context

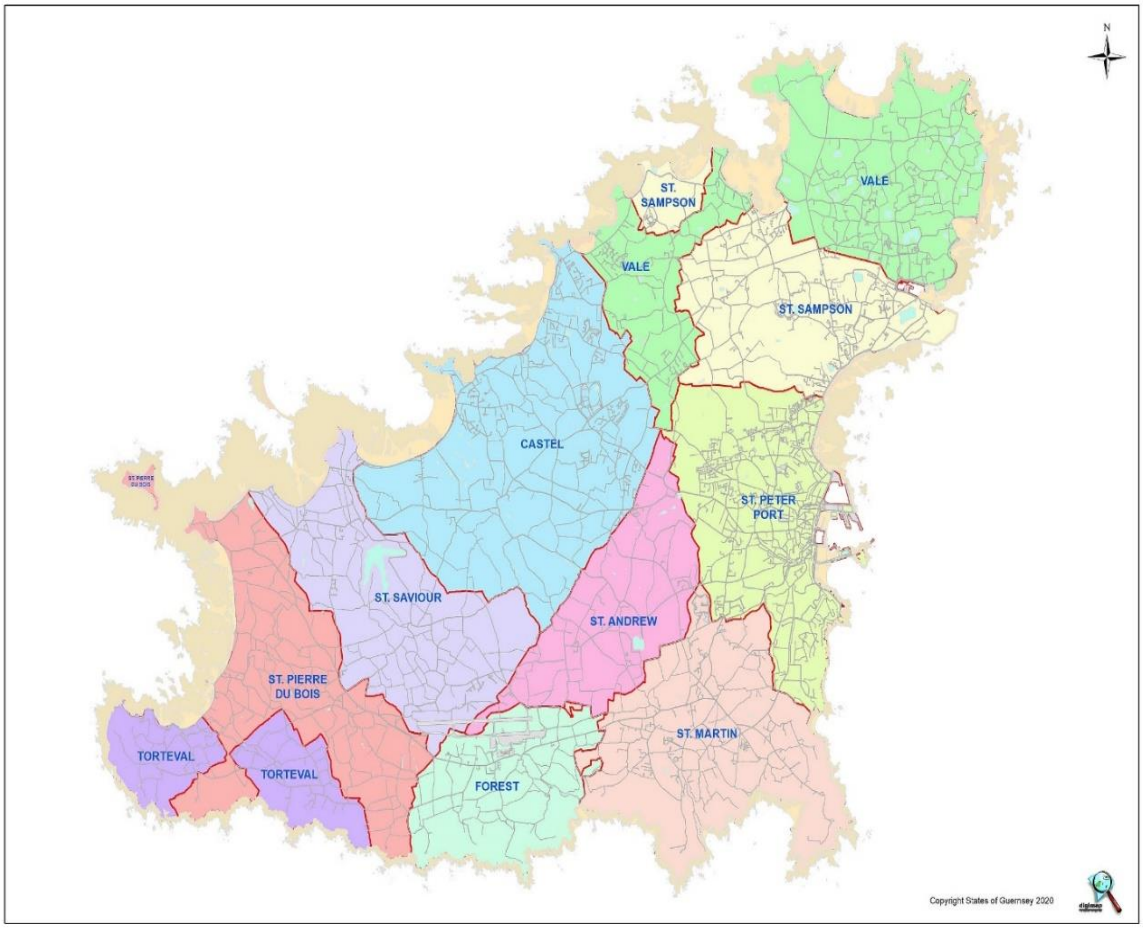
The Bailiwick of Guernsey is, alongside Jersey and the Isle of Man, one of three British Crown Dependencies. Guernsey is under the sovereignty of the British monarch but is not part of the United Kingdom, which is responsible for Guernsey's defence and international representation. Like the Faroe Islands (a dependency of Denmark), Guernsey has never been a part of the European Union. It covers a land area of 65 km^2 and also includes a number of smaller islands and islets. Historically and culturally part of Normandy, but politically separate from it since the Treaty of Le Goulet in 1204, Guernsey lies in the Bay of St Malo and is located 48 km from mainland France and 113 km from the south coast of Britain. Guernesiais, a Norman French dialect, is used in administrative and governmental circles and 14% of islanders claim some understanding of the language, although there are fewer than fifty to 200 fluent speakers (States of Guernsey, 2020d and Wilson, Johnson & Sallabank, 2014). Each parish is headed by a directly elected douzaine, or council. Two elected constables carry out the decisions of each douzaine from a parish hall. Parishes take responsibility for lower tier governance and wider community events, and are at the heart of the island's social and cultural life. The parish is therefore not only the building block of Guernsey's democracy, but of island society more generally (see Figure 1). Marc Winn is the co-founder of the Dandelion Foundation, a not for profit organisation focused on empowering small self-governing states to becomes centres for social and economic innovation. In an interview conducted via Zoom on 20th October 2020, Winn discussed Guernsey's political context and culture,

> We are part of the Norman lineage so there is a subservient relationship from a legal aspect with the UK with us being part of Normandy. A lot of the centre right can be quite progressive here as well and the culture is quite centrist. We are moving much more to a wellbeing economy. We have one of the lowest costs of government in the world per GDP and social outcomes are similar to Nordic ones; that is 21% of GDP, whereas the UK is 38%; and France is 50%. And we are delivering the outcomes. We are a democracy. You cannot just not look after people. The question for me is how we do this.

Les Etats de Guernesey, the States of Guernsey, is the island's government. It consists of thirty-eight People's Deputies elected every four years and is known as the States of Deliberation when convened as a legislature. Before the October 2020 general election, deputies were elected from seven electoral constituencies loosely based on the parish system. Candidates traditionally produced personal manifestos that emphasised both generic policy

priorities and focused on personal characteristics, education, professional experience and other background information. There were no political parties on the island until 2020.

Figure 1: Map of the island of Guernsey, showing the parishes and their boundaries.



Source: States of Guernsey. (Reproduced with permission.)

For a territory of its size, Guernsey is unique in following a committee structure for government rather than a ministerial system, as is the case in far smaller jurisdictions such as Gibraltar (population 33,718) and the Faroe Islands (population 48,497). The chair of the Policy and Resources Committee serves as the island's chief minister and other committee chairs serve *de facto* as ministers. A system of consensus government is both the tradition and expectation on the island where, instead of investing executive authority in a small number of deputies, the system relies – in principle at least – upon collegiality and collectivism. With a degree of autonomy that stops short of full independence, Guernsey is, therefore, historically, one of "many jurisdictions that have amassed or been endowed with considerable amounts of self-rule" (Baldacchino, 2018, p. 8).

Literature review

The Crown Dependencies exercise powers similar to those of independent states. This demands closer analysis for two reasons; first, within the context of small states, small autonomous territories and island societies (Baldacchino, 2006; Rezvani, 2014) and second, as recognised and under-researched components of a "British family" (Ministry of Justice, 2020,

p.3). The politics of the three Crown Dependencies have only attracted intermittent interest, and it is appropriate to view Guernsey within this broader jurisdictional category.

Literature on the Isle of Man focuses on constitutional evolution and the mechanics of government. Manx political development in the twentieth century is framed within the context of the island's journey from quasi-colonialism to self-government, with an explicit call for further research into the island's politics (Kermode, 2001). Subsequent literature discusses constitutional development and governmental processes, with distinctive Manx legislative features explored as part of the island's constitutional evolution using a comparative approach with the United Kingdom (Kermode, 2002). A major review of the island's parliamentary governance (Lisvane, 2016) led to analysis of the subsequently instituted constitutional reforms within a small democracy theoretical and comparative framework (Edge, 2020). In contrast, most of the literature on Jersey centers on the impact of the island's offshore financial industry and this attracts some external commentary (Murphy, 2010, Shaxson, 2012 and Bullough, 2015). A focus of the literature on Jersey has been upon assessing broader economic policy and available strategies (Entwistle & Oliver, 2015) and the island's development trajectory, where weak political governance has been identified as a contributory problem in Jersey's capacity for reviewing policy options (Oliver, 2019). There has been very limited discussion of elite political culture on the island within the context of financial practices (Mitchell & Sikka, 1999) and of the relationship between the island's constitutional position versus practical economic constraints (Le Rendu, 2004). Government reports and policy papers outline strategic goals, economic options, policy and broader societal development options (States of Jersey 2011, 2018, 2021). Whilst peer reviewed journal articles on the politics of the Crown Dependencies have been sporadic, these other documents, originating from the islands themselves, provide significant material for researchers. Guernsey's policy and resources committee, the senior committee of government, undertook a significant piece of research that reviewed the island's governance structures, using an appreciative enquiry methodology which drew extensively upon the experiences of deputies and senior civil servants (States of Guernsey, 2019). This initiated structural reforms relating to systems and behaviour which passed unnoticed beyond the island. Guernsey has, however, been used as a case study exploring how election candidates construct their own personal brand in a competitive political system that was then without political parties (Pich, Armannsdottir & Dean, 2020). Considerable insight is provided into the motivations and experiences of those who seek election to the States of Deliberation, and the transient, non-ideological and pre-party shifting coalitions of deputies is discussed. Indeed, the practical operation of the island's electoral politics and political recruitment is outlined in some detail, leaving room for further research into what this means for subsequent election cycles and the emergence of political parties on the island. This paper seeks to build upon such understanding by looking at a specific event in this largely unexplored political system within the British Isles, the context of which is experiencing considerable change.

Gaps exist within this still uneven and partial literature on the politics of the Crown Dependencies. There is a dominant focus upon issues that are by-products of the political systems themselves, and further insights are required into the structures that underpin policy formulation processes and, significantly, unique political cultures that require deeper understanding. First, no study has explored the context, circumstances or impact of a specific election; second, there has been no exploration of the appearance, development, status or prospects of political parties. These two areas of enquiry are increasingly pertinent given the Crown Dependencies evolving international identities post-Brexit (UK Parliament, 2017) and this paper seeks to do both.

Methodology

This article adopts a phenomenological approach as its theoretical framework. Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that focuses on the study of an individuals' lived experiences in the world (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019). Originally conceptualised by Edmund Husserl in the early twentieth century (Husserl, 2012) it built upon the work of other theorists in the late 1800s (Brentano, 2014). Phenomenologists focus on how we come to share a similar understanding of the world around us, known as the lifeworld (Brooks, 2015). It is this emphasis in the way the world appears through our actual, lived experiences that is key to assessing the impact of this event and its immediate aftermath (Moran, 2000).

Sample

An initial questionnaire, followed by extended interviews in a conversational format, were used to gauge reaction to the process and outcome of Guernsey's general election and its impact upon the island's political development. This allowed interviewees to focus upon this specific, single political event, and to reflect upon and consider their own personal experiences as participants and observers. An awareness of the advantages and challenges of such an approach was recognised throughout (Adhabi & Blash Anozie, 2017; Kelley, Clark, Brown & Sitzia, 2003). This two-part approach of a questionnaire and follow up interview allowed participants time for focused reflection. A purposive sampling framework was used to select participants in order to secure the involvement of available and directly relevant subject participants (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Selected participants were contacted by email in late October 2020 and invited to contribute to the research; those responding positively were then given a questionnaire to complete that asked open questions and which provided participants with scope to expand and answer as their lived experiences saw fit. A pilot was undertaken with four initial participants. A total of thirty people were identified and contacted. This consisted of first-time candidates, unsuccessful candidates, former deputies, current deputies, journalists and those involved in civil society groups. This elicited twenty indications of interest in participation, ten who failed to respond and the return of ten questionnaires leading to eight further interviews, which took place between late November and early December 2020. In the case of two participants, ensuing interviews were deemed unnecessary. Interviews were conducted by telephone and online via Zoom and these lasted from fifty to 90 minutes. This subsequently led to snowball sampling with identified participants suggesting additional participants (Browne, 2005). Three further questionnaires were received in January and February 2021, leading to one additional telephone interview in late January 2021.

Analysis

Each questionnaire was read several times and scrutinised for initial reactions and common themes. They were then used to produce additional research notes ahead of interviews, which were transcribed verbatim, and further notes were generated. Questionnaires and interviews produced a significant and substantial amount of original insights and material that provided a range of perspectives on Guernsey's recent general election and the development of the island's political system. Qualitative enquiry advice and directions as set out by Butler-Kisber (2010) were used as a basis for analysing Guernsey's societal circumstances and political context.

Findings

To recap, this paper set out to analyse Guernsey's general election of 2020 and its political implications. The research highlighted four themes that are connected with this experience. First, the significance of the 2018 electoral system referendum as a disrupter of existing and historic political networks; second, the emergence of a nascent party system; third, the mechanics of the electoral process itself, and fourth, the short-term implications of the election. Each provides deep insight into understanding this event and its consequences for Guernsey's politics and governance.

The road to 2020: the 2018 electoral system referendum

A referendum on electoral reform was held in October 2018 and a turnout of 40% was required for any change to take effect. The States undertook some constitutional changes in the early 2000s that abolished elected island-wide conseillers and removed douzaine representatives from the assembly. This created a precedent for campaigners to argue the case for island-wide voting, a proposal that had been initiated unsuccessfully on a number of previous occasions. In 2016, the campaign was successful but it required the States Assembly and Constitution Committee to draft referendum legislation. This was Guernsey's first local referendum, and the fact that this instrument had not been made use of previously in such a small jurisdiction attracted criticism from a former deputy (BBC News Guernsey, 2012). However, it was not the first referendum to be held on the island. In 2012, St James Concert and Assembly Hall in the island's capital, St Peter Port, was one of 85 satellite polling stations across 41 countries for the island's Latvian citizens who voted in their national referendum to determine whether or not Russian should be Latvia's official second language, a proposal that was ultimately rejected (Druviete & Ozolins, 2012). The publicity in Guernsey around the island's Latvian community served to stimulate a wider discussion on the use of referendums on the island. Five options were presented to voters on 10th October 2018. Option A, where all thirty-eight deputies would represent Guernsey under island-wide voting, secured victory on the fourth count, supported by 52.5% of the 45% of electors who turned out. Option B proposed seven constituencies with five or six seats in each, Option C proposed even constituencies with three, four or five seats, and one ten-member constituency covering the whole island with voters having two votes, one for their district candidate and one for an island-wide constituency. Option D proposed a lowering to four constituencies with a variable number of deputies elected from each, and Option E a single island-wide constituency with one third of members elected at a time for a six-year term.

Deputy Carl Meerveld, who campaigned for island-wide voting, summarised the impact of the new electoral system in a telephone interview on 15th October 2020.

> It is revolutionary and it utterly transforms the nature of politics on our island. It changes the characteristics of the people who stand for election and those who are ultimately successful. Instead of what is essentially a popularity contest at a parish level, with people who may or may not have a recognisable Guernsey surname and be community activists, we will now have island-wide debates. The old system led to the election of social and community activists with a high profile in their parish. There is now a need to address island-wide issues and engage in policy decisions that will move Guernsey forward. The implications are significant and will inevitably lead to more coherent political groupings, giving voters greater clarity of choice.

Dr Adrian Lee, former professor of politics at University of Plymouth and current BBC commentator on the Channel Islands, said,

> Without any real party system, this will be unique. As far as I can determine, there is no other jurisdiction of this size trying to elect that many people at once using 'first-past-the-post' (BBC News Guernsey, 2020).

Guernsey's general election was postponed from June to October 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The States produced a Combined Manifesto document which was posted online and distributed to every household, and to which every candidate was allocated a double page spread in alphabetical order by surname, although nine declined to provide details. (Guernsey Election 2020). A 'meet the candidates' event was held at the Beau Sejour Leisure Centre on 20th September. In the 2016 general election, the last to be held under the old system, Joe Mooney was elected as the lowest polling winner in the multi-member St Peter Port North district with 799 votes. In the 2020 general election, Meerveld was elected in the 38th and final position with 6,477 votes. The change meant that candidates could no longer rely upon an appeal to a small number of voters in an individual district, but were instead now required to bid for votes on a whole-island basis. The expectation was that one in four electors would need to support a candidate for them to be successful under island-wide voting. This created space for the emergence of political parties.

An emerging party system?

The move to island-wide voting is linked to the emergence of Guernsey's first political parties and this was an intention of those involved in the campaign for electoral reform. The Islanders' Association was established to campaign for island wide voting and was disbanded when this was achieved. Its successor organisation, the 2020 Association, was expected to develop into Guernsey's first political party, given its campaigning on a number of political issues around governmental scrutiny. Whilst this did not happen, there were clear policy overlaps between the 2020 Association and the three parties that did emerge, and whose registration was required in law by the Royal Court to contest the 2020 general election: the Alliance Party Guernsey, the Guernsey Party and the Guernsey Partnership of Independents. Between them, these three parties fielded forty-one of the 119 candidates in an election still dominated by independents. Two of the three parties managed to get their leaders elected. The Alliance Party Guernsey was led by Barry Weir, the Guernsey Party was headed by Mark Helyar, whilst the Guernsey Partnership of Independents was a loose and informal structure that included a number of sitting deputies. Before we examine these three parties, it is necessary to place them in a theoretical context. Examining Guernsey's political parties, or even labelling them as such, is problematic. The party typologies do not neatly fit into the conventional frameworks (e.g. Kirchheimer, 1966; Neumann, 1956). Gunther and Diamond (2003) have argued that an explosion in party diversity means that existing typologies, largely applicable to Western Europe in the early twentieth century, are inadequate in capturing the vast range of current parties. Their revised classifications are helpful when applying party typology to Guernsey and other small jurisdictions, assuming that a party is a standalone organisation, which all of Guernsey's parties are, rather than a branch of a party in a territory's sovereign state. Five initial observations can be made about Guernsey's political parties. First, under the Gunther and Diamond typology, all are organisationally thin parties. This is perhaps to be expected when new organisations have been launched in what has until recently been a party free environment. Second, the parties' locus ranges from centrist to libertarian right, and there are policy overlaps between all three of them. Third, the current, or indeed potential future

parties on the island, are unlikely to pursue an organisational model of mass membership when the culture of supporting independent candidates is so strong. Fourth, with the exception of the Alliance, the two other parties heavily emphasised the individual qualities of their respective candidates rather than an over-reliance on a central platform, thereby building on the island's tradition of independent candidates. Indeed, there may be a correlation between the Alliance's poor electoral performance and its greater focus upon the party, as opposed to the individual, platform. Fifth, and perhaps unusually given the context, what Gunther and Diamond (2003) term a personalistic party did not emerge. The only rationale for such a party is for an identifiable, media-friendly and usually charismatic leader to win election, with the party structure acting as a vehicle for that end.

Electoral law necessitated party registration. The Alliance Party Guernsey was the first political party to register on the island on 12th February 2020 and is a centre right conservative party. The Alliance is an example of Gunther and Diamond's programmatic party, a thinly organised entity whose existence and main function is for the conduct of election campaigns. The party's launch document emphasised the policy consistency electors could expect in voting for a political party, with a call for reduced taxes both a specific pledge amongst its six key policies and a governing principle in itself. Without going into specifics, the Alliance pledged improved access to healthcare for those on low incomes (there is no NHS and general practitioner visits are chargeable in Guernsey), endorsement of the widely supported three-school model for the island's high school provision, where the reform of secondary education on the island has been a controversial issue for many years, and the reintroduction of private education bursaries. The party sought to extend property ownership amongst local residents by creating a new classification applicable only to those born on the island. Where candidate backgrounds were provided in the Combined Manifesto, they were drawn from the business, finance and retail sectors. The Alliance fielded eleven candidates but none were elected. Their top placed candidate secured 87th place in the field of 119 candidates, and with no operational website or social media presence a few weeks after the election, it appears that the party has effectively disbanded after a disappointing performance.

The Guernsey Party registered on 5th August 2020, presenting voters with a highly developed policy platform, including a plan that its elected deputies would pursue in the first one hundred days of the new States. The Guernsey Party was the most highly organised of the three parties with a constitution and a centralised membership system. The party's stated aim was,

> [t]o create a political organisation which provides a rallying point for deputies and candidates who are minded to deliver cooperative, reliable and cohesive government at the centre-right of Guernsey politics, focused on delivering value for money, a thriving economy and a high standard of living and quality of life for all residents of the Bailiwick (Guernsey Party Constitution, 2020).

No sitting deputies were party members. The Guernsey Party is a classical liberal and right libertarian party that advocates smaller government, low taxation, fiscal prudence, free enterprise, transparency and accountability and "cost effective and proportionate social policy" (Guernsey Party Constitution, 2020). The party's platform resembles that of New Zealand's Association of Consumers and Taxpayers (ACT). The party's nine candidates were overwhelmingly drawn from business and the law, and six were elected, with party leader Mark Helyar securing fourth place in the island wide poll. The Guernsey Party has some characteristics of an elite party, and what Gunther and Diamond (2003) term the traditional

local notable party, based upon an alliance of locally based elites, and this was reflected in the candidate profiles provided for the Combined Manifesto. Although organisationally thin under the Gunther and Diamond typology, of the three parties on the island, the Guernsey Party is most likely to be the one that moves towards a thicker and more formalised organisational model. In response to an email questionnaire on 15th October, Guernsey Party leader Mark Helyar observed the following about his party's experience of the election.

> We went from forming a party to election in about ten weeks, and managed to get 75% of our candidates elected; so we are delighted. We identified ourselves as centre-right in order to distinguish between our principles of fiscal prudence and the previous government, which was considered left-leaning and focused on social rather than economic policy. The process was made quite difficult in particular for parties by having a very limited expenditure limit (£9,000) which could only be made up of transfers from candidates (who themselves had a limit of £6,000). The more party members you have, the more complex the accounting becomes, as anything with a party logo on it needs to have some cost apportioned to it. We were forced to delay the launch of our party because of confusion over definitions in the legislation and a formal complaint to the Registrar about another party formation. This hampered our ability to garner other candidates before the election commenced. If one looks at the voting response, parties were probably not the leading means of people selecting their votes, although we know from discussion that it certainly formed part of it. There was some resistance to the idea of parties but we were usually able to convince people to consider us. Parties cannot really work at the moment unless they have an absolute majority (we do not have executive government or a 'first-past-the-post' system). Our group of six elected from thirty-eight, however, sits between two major factions in government so we may end up controlling government by holding the balance of power.

The Guernsey Partnership of Independents registered on 18th August 2020 and included a number of existing deputies and then chief minister Gavin St Pier. Centrist in outlook, the Partnership's candidates espoused a range of views from social democratic to conservative. The Partnership said of itself that "we are not a party in the UK sense: we are independents committed to effective consensus government" (Guernsey Partnership of Independents, 2020). They state that,

> We are a partnership of independent candidates, committed to making government more decisive, effective and efficient. We have formed the Partnership to assist the electorate in selecting individual candidates who are committed to that purpose. Our ongoing mission is to encourage the highest standards of island governance: a key part of that is helping the electorate identify constructive candidates who, if elected to the States, will work with all members to improve the efficiency of government and to improve the lives of all people in Guernsey (Guernsey Partnership of Independents, 2020).

The Partnership models Peter Macfadyen's Flatpack Democracy initiative in Frome, Somerset (Macfadyen, 2014) where a group of independents with often different policy positions closely co-operate. The Partnership drew upon candidate name recognition, especially from sitting deputies, alongside extensive use of social media. It identified five principles and goals as part of its manifesto. These included: an investment in Revive and Thrive (States of Guernsey, 2020c), the States' post-Covid-19 economic recovery strategy; the integration of health and social care; a climate change action plan, a commitment to Guernsey's autonomy and self-government and a new constitutional settlement for the island post-Brexit.

Under the Gunther and Diamond (2003) typology, the Partnership is organisationally thin with elements of a movement party advocating loose programmatic commitments. However, the policy basis is strong and distinctive enough not to categorise the Partnership as a catch-all party. Out of twenty-one candidates fielded ten were elected, five of whom placed in the top thirteen, with Gavin St Pier and health committee convenor Heidi Soulsby securing first and second place finishes, attributed by many to their widely praised handling of Guernsey's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, there was a serious debate on the island as to whether such a partnership approach was required at all. Winn observes,

> If you look at the Guernsey Party and the Alliance Party, I think those guys were elected as individuals. So, I think the overwhelming majority of the population ignored the party frameworks. I would be very surprised if the party system ever takes full hold here because a lot of people reacted against it. Guernsey is an interesting system. No one would ever agree to a whip here. The Alliance Party got nothing and they were looking at a whipped model. The Partnership was more values and behaviour. The history here is about consensus government and building alliances on an issue by issue basis, and there are regular lines that are formed. There are progressive populist lines, but on some issues it would be a different calibration and it really depends what it is. I think there will be more attempts to define it and refine it. We will not have whipped parties. We may have co-marketing partnerships and loose agreements around certain things, but still maintaining independents as the bulk.

For territories of their size, the British Crown Dependencies are European outliers in not having an established party system. The Faroes, Gibraltar and Greenland are all considerably smaller in population and have decades old political parties as does independent San Marino (population 33,785) and Liechtenstein (population 38,378). However, Jersey (population 97,857) has two established political parties and the Isle of Man (population 84,077) has three. Historically, all Crown Dependency parties operate in systems dominated by independents, with minimal to negligible party parliamentary representation. Guernsey is, therefore, itself an outlier amongst the Crown Dependencies in only recently acquiring political parties. David Earl is a former member of the States of Alderney – itself part of the Bailiwick of Guernsey – and is a broadcast journalist who covered Guernsey's 2020 general election for BBC Channel Islands News. In a written response to email questions on 23rd October 2020, he stated that,

> Island-wide voting certainly encouraged the emergence of political parties/groupings. I suspect these will seek to consolidate their position over the next four years. Meanwhile, I suspect the public will wait and see how it will manifest itself and, more important, deal with the problems Guernsey faces.

These views were echoed by Shelaine Green in a written response to an email questionnaire on 20th October 2020. Green chairs Women in Public Life Guernsey, a voluntary group whose stated aim is to encourage more women to stand for public office on the island,

> Guernsey has put a first toe in the water of a party system. However, there is was only one traditional party, the Alliance Party, and all of their candidates were firmly rejected at the polls. The Guernsey Party and the Guernsey Partnership of Independents were groups of similar minded individuals rather than parties. It was useful, as a voter facing such a large field, to have candidates grouped together but, anecdotally, it appears that voters picked out individuals from those groups, rather than voting for all of them.

Peter Coffey, the longest serving deputy to participate in this research, also argues that the voting system drove the emergence of parties, but questioned their ultimate durability. In a written response to an email questionnaire on 29th January 2021, he argued that,

> I am not sure there has been any move towards a party system in Guernsey. I think it was more a way of making an almost impossible voting system more navigable by candidates grouping together to fight the election. Since the election, you would be forgiven for forgetting that two parties allegedly exist in our States. Members have not shown any particular tendency to vote together and neither party has produced a coherent policy agenda. I suspect one or both parties will soon disband and I doubt anybody will notice. In the unlikely event that genuine party politics were to evolve in Guernsey I think it would be extremely damaging, leading to point scoring, negativity and destructive adversarial politics. Not to mention squandering some of our very scarce talent in opposition.

With a precedent for some form of more formal political groupings established, it will be interesting to revisit this issue in a few years from now. Guernsey now has a greater number of party representatives in its parliament than the other Crown Dependencies. Nevertheless, just as in Jersey and the Isle of Man, independents look likely to continue to dominate Guernsey's political landscape as the island's voters resist fully embracing a party system.

Running the election

The voting age in Guernsey is sixteen and over. Registration is open to people ordinarily resident in Guernsey, who are at least fifteen years of age and who have completed an annual registration form, distributed by the States, to be added to the roll of voters confirming those requirements. The number of female deputies elected declined from twelve to eight. A threshold of 6,475 votes was required for election. The results were declared on 9th October 2020 and confirmed the following day, after a recount requested by four unsuccessful candidates. Out of 30,899 registered voters, 24,627 cast their votes, representing a turnout of 79.7%. Some 67% of voters opted for a postal ballot (Elections Guernsey, 2020). However, only half of those eligible to vote were actually registered to do so (Elections Guernsey, 2020) and despite the election itself running smoothly in a logistical sense, all respondents expressed concern as to the quality of voter engagement with the process. Roffey argues,

> I found the experience of the recent election pretty dire. As a voter I found (despite being a political anorak) I was wholly unable to carry out any in-depth assessment of the 119 candidates. As a result I felt I failed to properly discharge my democratic duty and I suspect 99% of others were equally guilty. The probable consequence was that people voted on the strength of shallow soundbites and one-liners. As a candidate I found it completely impossible to properly engage with the electorate. I worked 14 hours a day, visited 5,000 homes, attended, several hustings, answered hundreds of emails and yet my level of interaction with voters was way below what it had been in any of the other six general elections I have contested.

Implications

We can draw five immediate conclusions from Guernsey's first island-wide election. First, logistically and in terms of voter engagement, it was a success. Interest was perhaps further boosted by what Winn describes as Guernsey's "explosion in togetherness" as a result of the collective experience of the Covid-19 pandemic which emphasised trust and community as consistent themes. He continued,

> Island-wide voting was a populist response to frustration at the way the election system was previously run. It was a very powerful process. The theory is we boil it down to its smallest component. You are asking people to do hours of work and research to vote which all of the theory would say you would reduce engagement. Actually, it did the opposite. Record registrations, record candidates and record turnout. It drove a very interesting public conversation that drove participation.

Earl argues,

> When the States of Deliberation voted in favour of island-wide voting, I imagined the electorate would have a problem trying to choose thirty-eight names from a ballot paper with what turned out to be 119 names. However, having seen the new system at first hand and listened to comments from both the electorate and candidates, I have somewhat revised my opinion. Considering Guernsey had not had an island wide election before, it all went remarkably smoothly. What was really interesting was the fact that postal votes accounted for two thirds of the votes cast. I filmed half of the polling stations on Wednesday 7th October and they were all deserted. Indeed, the person in charge of the Castel polling station told me they had more people dropping off postal votes than people actually voting on the day. I also filmed the count and re-count, both of which went remarkably smoothly. However, the organisers totally underestimated the time the count would take and ended up having to draft in extra people to speed things up. The outcome of the election was clearly a vote for change with around half the successful candidates standing for the first time. The knock-on effect of this has been a massive change in the composition of States Committees.

This was echoed by Green, who highlighted the additional responsibilities now placed on voters that may have impacted upon the final results,

> Overall, the process ran much more smoothly than I was anticipating, and all credit to everyone involved. I appreciated the candidate brochure, the www.Election2020.gg website and the 'Meet the candidates' event at Beau Sejour. However, the voter was expected to do a huge amount of work to get to know the candidates properly. Rather than assessing, say, twelve district candidates for six seats, the voter had to assess 119 candidates for thirty-eight seats. I am particularly politically engaged and put in a lot of effort but still I know my decisions were less considered than under the parish system. I can imagine there were some pretty cursory decisions being made by those picking up the candidate brochure for the first time on the night before polling closed.

Second, as we have seen, political parties experienced very mixed fortunes. Sixteen deputies now identify with a party or political grouping of some description, but twenty-two do not, placing independents in the majority. The durability of the two parties that were

successful in getting their candidates elected is debatable; but, it appears likely that parties will maintain a presence in Guernsey's political system in some form. Of more immediate note, however, is the extent and degree of change represented by the number of new candidates elected, who were overwhelmingly from business and finance backgrounds espousing minimalist state views. Twenty deputies are now new to the States and the locus has now shifted to the right. There was a high turnover of deputies. Eleven sitting members were defeated in the election, including the outgoing presidents of the education and home affairs committees, with the latter having served as "mother of the house", being first elected in 1994.

It is reasonable to suggest that both former deputies would have enjoyed better prospects under the old system. Green comments that,

> A notable outcome in this election was a coalescence around the traditional view of what a politician should look like: a businessman in his fifties or sixties. The number of people over seventy declined dramatically from six to one. There was no one elected who was under thirty. The number of women reduced from twelve to eight. It appears (hard to assess definitively) that the majority of candidates from lower income backgrounds were rejected. It is not possible to say whether this focus on businessmen was purely a political shift in response to uncertain times or was a product of island-wide voting. A neophyte States that will take at least a year to begin function effectively. We do not have a year. Covid-19 and Brexit are now.

The choice of the electorate was not reflected in what happened after the election. One commentator suggested that a casualty of the new voting system was democracy itself. The outgoing chief minister, Gavin St Pier, topped the poll with 13,925 votes, but Peter Ferbrache, who finished fifth with 11,146 votes, emerged as his replacement. The precedent has been established that whoever polls in first place should not necessarily be seen as having a mandate to be chief minister, a democratic deficit of the new system. Third, island wide voting has started to have a knock on effect in driving up candidate participation in Guernsey's local elections but not turnout. These took place on 4th November 2020 for connetable and douzaine positions. In the previous election cycle, out of the island's ten parishes, there was only one where there were more candidates than seats. In the 2020 elections, there were seven, with the number of new female candidates increasing almost fourfold, echoing Marc Winn's point that "being a (general election) candidate is a gateway drug into community leadership." Fourth, when island-wide voting was introduced, there was a commitment to use the system for at least two elections, so Guernsey's next general election, scheduled for 2025, will also use this method. A review is ongoing, and this is driving a conversation about how the system can be modified and improved. The Guernsey Party has suggested rolling elections, where half of the states are elected every two years, and there are calls for a reduction in the number of deputies, perhaps by as much as half. Indeed, one interviewee made the point that, if Guernsey was represented in the United Kingdom parliament, then it would elect only one MP. With a critical mass of centre-right deputies openly calling for smaller government, we cannot rule out a reduction in States Assembly members. Fifth, there is the likelihood of further innovation in governance driven by the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic (following Guernsey's 2020 summer of few restrictions), Brexit (where the United Kingdom is controversially attempting to legislate for the island on fishing rights), island wide voting, the emphasis on a wellbeing economy and the role of technology. A debate has started, referencing digital democracy and how this might look in the Channel Islands, rather than a reliance on an election every five years (Beacon, 2020). These are issues that larger territories may struggle with; but where smaller jurisdictions like Guernsey, with its ability to write legislation in as little as twelve

hours, will be able to show agility and adaptability. This underlines the importance of studying the experiences of small sovereign states and subnational jurisdictions.

Discussion

This paper seeks to contribute to an understanding of Guernsey's political system using the island's recent general election as an example of change in an under-researched and non-traditional context. It addresses specific calls for further research into the politics and government of the Crown Dependencies (Kermode, 2001) and into the emergence and potential transience of political brands in different systems (Pich, Armansdottir, & Dean, 2020). More broadly, it fulfils a need to shine a light on an insufficiently researched and unique small territory system of government experiencing significant change, the full impact of which is not yet possible to assess (Baldacchino, 2018). It suggests that political parties, or looser groupings of some sort, are likely to be a continuing feature of Guernsey's political process, however transient and evolving these may ultimately prove to be with the 2018 referendum having acted as the driver for change. A rich seam of original research material has been used, and there has been an attempt to place the first discussion on the emergence of Guernsey's political parties in a broader theoretical context. This paper proposes that space may now open up for further innovation and change in the island's governance, as elected representatives review the experience of the first election using island wide voting, within the context of a community that has enjoyed considerable success in tackling the short term public health implications of the Covid-19 pandemic. From interviews, it is evident that Guernsey's political system is experiencing a period of profound change and uncertainty driven by island-wide voting. No consensus exists on whether this is the most appropriate mechanism for conducting elections. Several interviewees drew a distinction between the operation of running the first island wide election, which was seen as a success, and the quality of voter engagement, which was far harder to measure and of which there were significant concerns. Anxieties were consistently expressed about how individual voters could meaningfully assess all 119 candidates, and how a headline high turnout masked low levels of voter registration, and this fed into generic concerns about the consequent quality of decision making by those subsequently elected. Whilst political parties have appeared, this is embraced with varying degrees of enthusiasm within the context of a voting system that for practical reasons now advantaged candidate groupings. The wariness of political parties expressed by most interviewees underlines how this is a development that goes against the grain of an independent political culture. Indeed, this is a major change and possibly highlights a point made by Pich, Armansdottir and Dean (2020) that Guernsey does not have durable political parties in the conventionally understood sense at all, but merely the latest manifestations of the transient and pop up political groupings they describe. Political groupings now, perhaps, merely formalise what already existed previously. Interviewees were keen that the situation be reassessed a few years from now.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the context, process and impact of Guernsey's general election of 2020. It has analysed the emergence of the island's first political parties and discussed the implications of the election for Guernsey's politics and governance. We can also see that Guernsey provides us with an example of a polity that is moving towards a party system of sorts. Some of the reasons for this are unique to Guernsey and others are not, but it may help us to explain and track developments elsewhere, especially as Jersey recently saw the launch of the island's second political party which may be the start of a trend in all three islands.

This paper has its limitations. Exploring a single political even makes this research temporally limited, with its focus on immediate analysis rather than longer term developments. A reasonably sized and cross-sectional sample fully engaged and gave generously of their time to describe events from their individual perspectives, whether as first time candidates, experienced deputies, journalists or members of civic society groups, providing fascinating insights into Guernsey's election and political processes more generally. However, a larger sample would have yielded additional perspectives. Whilst snowballing sampling really helped, attempted access to a number of key players in the island's government was unsuccessful. Guernsey sealed its borders to non-essential travel on 25th March 2020 and has yet to re-open them. This paper was researched and written when such restrictions were in place, and despite the significant benefits of technology, there is no substitute for being there. Yet arising from these limitations we can identify opportunities for future research. There have been no election studies in any of the three Crown Dependencies, and therefore no explanations of voting behaviour, exploration of trends or discussion of the consequences of elections on each of the three political systems. Jersey and the Isle of Man both have general elections scheduled for 2021. As the three territories move towards the establishment of political parties, further insights are required into the branding, development and impact of these more formal groupings in the Crown Dependencies. Post-Brexit, more research should be given to both the constitutional development of the Crown Dependencies and their emerging international identities, particularly within the context of the British Irish Council, where Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man operate, theoretically at least, on equal terms with the British, Irish and devolved administrations. A comparative study of the three islands' responses to, and impact of, the Covid-19 pandemic would tell an interesting story of different political processes. A conclusion from this research is that there is plenty of available material for those interested in doing so.

Guernsey is an under-researched British island that has a distinct and recognised profile. With self-government dating back to the thirteenth century, Guernsey is one of the world's oldest small territories and more should be known about this island's political system. Doing so fulfils an obligation to better understand the British Isles as a whole. Indeed, with a carefully constituted sample, a phenomenological approach allows us to gather deep information and perceptions of the lived experiences of those in small states and territories. A key message of this article is that there is considerable further scope for research into the politics of the 'Britain that is not Britain' of the three Crown Dependencies. As the paucity of literature shows, Guernsey, with its unique politics and culture, is the least well known of the three. This article has attempted to provide a snapshot of Guernsey's politics and society using the 2020 general election as a case study, but with the inevitable limitations entailed. It is hoped that this article will ignite further research into the politics and government of the Crown Dependencies in general, and Guernsey in particular, within the context of small states and territories studies as all three develop their unique identities post-Brexit. As Winn stated,

> I find any island, or any outlier community, because of the nature of the constraints they face, solve things in a different way. Constraint breeds innovation and so there is a dynamic that something is going to emerge from small states. There will be a few zones in the world that bounce back stronger than before. There will be patterns and correlations. I hold Guernsey as a vision of what can be. These jurisdictions that can let go of the old systems are going to be stronger places to be and live in. When I was growing up this place felt like fifty years behind the rest of the world. These days, there is an overtaking going on as islands become more viable and large jurisdictions become less viable in the information age. It may not look that different but Covid-19 has really

shone the difference on island and small states where people have their own governance and you can see that overtaking manoeuvre happening. Islands have shot from being desolate to being innovative and agile national states in my lifetime. In the next ten, twenty, thirty years, that will accelerate exponentially. That is the new renaissance.

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